

# RACHMANINOFF

## RECITAL

By Wilson  
G. Smith

It is a rare instance when a musician attains equal eminence as a composer and executant, and especially is it so when said musician fills to its highest standard the essentials of both.

Among the host of composers and executants chronicled in the history of musical art the names so exalted are comparatively few and far between. To instance the highest examples of this artistic duality in more recent times one may cite the names of Liszt, Rubinstein, and to bring the matter nearer the present, the names of Scharwenka, Saint Saens, and Paderewski may be added to the gilded list. All these won fame thru their creative talent and executive ability in about equal measure.

And now after hearing the embodiment of the two essentials referred to in the person and artistry of Rachmaninoff, who was heard in recital at Grays Armory Monday night to the intense delight of an audience that filled the spacious auditorium to its full capacity, his name must be added to the list.

I can recall but two pianists of the present—one a composer-pianist, the other a pianistic artist—Paderewski and Josef Hofmann, who are comparable to this Russian Titan, and they only when at their best.

In retrospect I can recall only one who rose to greater emotional and pianistic heights—Rubinstein, and he as a matter of fact was a super-Titan. And at that, possibly an interval of some 30 years may have placed an almost legendary halo about his marvelous and wonder-provoking artistry.

### TERMED APEX OF PIANISTIC ARTISTRY

Be that as it may, a second hearing of the Russian genius confirms my former impression—that he is the apex of pianistic and interpretative artistry so far as present competition is concerned.

While he does not indulge in such cyclonic outbursts of dynamic frenzy as did Rubinstein, he attains climaxes of wondrous and impelling effect, and to this must be added a command of dynamic and tonal nuance that enters the domain of the most intimate and delicate poetry.

His playing of Mozart was the ne plus ultra of chaste refinement and exquisite tonal coloration.

In Chopin—especially the waltz and Barcarolle—he gave to the Polish poet an interpretation that was both elusive and virile.

His reading of the Ballade was quite different from any concept of the composition I have ever heard. By no means traditional, it had the glamour of individuality, and proved tradition is by no means the only copyright process of intelligent and effectual exposition and interpretation.

Rachmaninoff's program was one such as only a musician-pianist as he is would choose. It had no flamboyant virtuosity to exploit for the sake of the exploitation. All the compositions played—Mozart, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Grieg, and Rachmaninoff—while they made exacting demands upon an impeccable technic and attained brilliant climaxes, had the fundamental basis of ideas fraught with emotional significance and interpretative values.

### EXECUTIVE FLUENCY CAUSES ADMIRATION

So, while one sits in admiration of the executive fluency of the pianist, he is charmed to the greater extent thru the profound and versatile analysis evidenced by the variegated color in tone, and symmetrical exposition of constructive and temperamental development.

Which is one way of saying that Rachmaninoff is first a musician, and subordinately an executant. His playing is intensely subjective and analytical, and his tonal diagnosis indicates the introspective rather than the objective mind. One almost imagines him to be the actual creator of what he is playing, so little evidence is there of any intent or purpose of self-aggrandizement. Virtuosity is his without a doubt, but it is of patent expository character.

It were vain to presume to enter into a specific reference to all that he played. The halo of musicianship lightened all his remarkable work.

The height of enthusiasm was reached when, in response to insistent demands from an enthused audience, he played his famous Prelude as only he can play it—I say this advisedly, since I have heard it oft by other pianistic hands, but nothing like the impressive and compelling style that floated like the breath of summer from his hands.